

Awareness And Alertness

A true Shia - who comprehends the reality of his faith, and tries to dispel the worries and difficulties of those around him in the light of his belief and faith - will never miss an opportunity to gain proximity to Imam-e-Asr (a.s.). It is impossible to convey the severity of his trials and tribulations in this era. It is as if someone has placed a blistering coal on his palm and has asked him to close his fist. This is also one of the most astonishing prophecies of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) concerning the last era. As someone rightly said, "Today, Islam is facing an open onslaught from external foes, while internal enemies are attacking and sabotaging it, through apparent and concealed strategies." Malicious and vile strategies are raising their heads everywhere and inimical agents are working overtime. Things have reached to such a stage that now people have brazenly and shamelessly opened factories and centers of misguidance and deviation.

If for a moment we were to overlook the happenings in the world and observe our immediate surroundings and critically analyze all the events, don't we find that misguided agents, under the guise of Islam are swiftly and rapidly spreading destruction and devastation? Today, which society does not speak about achieving success in the field of worldly education? In these societies, not getting an English newspaper and being unaware of worldly events is considered to be a sign of backwardness and ignorance.

This scary and frightening era, where the currency of honesty and truthfulness does not fetch anything - rather the world derides and ridicules it - demands an agonizing heart. Who will pay heed to such a conscientious person when his cries are subdued by the clamour of politics, pleasures, self-glorification, amassing of wealth and mixing of truth & falsehood? And if anyone were to lend him an ear, would it have any effect on the listener? O My Benevolent and compassionate Allah!! In these times of turmoil and difficulties - where blood is cheap and water expensive - but for the benevolence and kindness of Imam-e-Asr (a.s.) we would have certainly been embroiled in all kinds of calamities and tribulations to an extent that we would have wished for death but it would have shied away from us.

When I picked up the pen to express my anguish, my thoughts suddenly flashed towards Ghadeer-e-Khumm, where the blessed name of Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) was mentioned. My heart was comforted by this thought and I found solace in it. When I was critically recollecting the above mentioned experiences - as if I was witnessing them in my mind's eye - and linking all the events, I felt that someone was criticizing and reprimanding me. Someone was telling me. 'It is not like this. "Come out of the gloom of your despair and despondency. The path of life is lit with the torch of hope and "awaiting" (Intezar). Listen carefully to the voice of the past. And you will hear a call emanating through the crevice of history. This clarion call first reverberated in the scorching desert of Ghadeer-e-Khumm. An audience of more than a hundred thousand pilgrims was standing in the sweltering heat of the mid-day sun. They were on their way back home after wishes and this power has been bestowed upon him (a.s.) by Allah the All-Powerful. Blessed is the Imam (a.s.) in whose control is the entire universe. This world is a place of examination and each one of us is bound to be examined. The benchmark of succeeding in this examination is "good actions". Thus, there is reward as well as punishment; in this world and of course in the Hereafter. 'Travel on the earth and see what was the fate of the transgressors.

Hence, we have been made aware of the implementation of religious laws and also cautioned about them. This mortal man – made of flesh and bones - would tremble with fear before cutting off ties with his relatives, making greed and gluttony as a way of life, feeling proud of emulating the lifestyle of oppressors and before adorning his personality by trampling the sentiments of others and deriding the deprived individuals of the society - those who are leading a simple and straightforward life in the remembrance of their Imam (a.s.). He should know that the Imam (a.s.) of the era carries the 'whip of time' which is held in check by the tears of those who mourn on his grandfather (a.s.). The tears of these mourners also ensure the continuity of his (a.s.) favours, grace and mercy. A torrent of benevolence and munificence is always flowing from the tent of Imam (a.s.) towards his Shias. But if someone violates the limits of Shiaism for the sake of personal gains, thereby incurring the wrath of Imam (a.s.), then only the mercy and kindness of Imam (a.s.) can rescue such a person.

Briefly, when we have realized that we are living in the reign of Imam-e-Asr (a.s.), that he (a.s.) is Allah's representative for the entire universe and we also know that his (a.s.) power and authority encompasses each and every creation of Allah, then it obligatory on everyone – but more so on the Shias of Imam-e-Asr (a.s.) – that they should always be vigilant of the orders and commands that are proclaimed from the office of Imam (a.s.) in these tumultuous times. In this era of occultation, Imam (a.s.) has established a strong and continuous link between himself (a.s.) and the respected Maraaje' (spiritual leaders) of our community. These maraaje' are the fountainhead of religious laws and strive to follow them resolutely (do Taqleed) and give them preference over own wishes and desires. Thus, we unite our existence with Imam (a.s.). Only then we have the right to look at that exalted level of human behavior that is the centre of radiance and inspiration. For this to occur, it is essential that the lamp of hope - accompanied with the radiance of intellect and wisdom - shows us the way. It is also necessary that the pleasure and joy of waiting and the fervent desire for reappearance of Imam (a.s.) – which is an unfulfilled aspiration and is like an arrow embedded in our hearts - should not be dimmed by the sleep of negligence. Every morning, after performing the morning prayers, we should renew our allegiance to our Imam (a.s.) in a manner that has been explained to us by our venerable scholars. Here we reproduce a part of that allegiance,

.....O Allah! This morning and in every day of my life, I renew for him (a.s.) the pledge, covenant and allegiance on my neck. I will never turn away from it nor shall I squander it. O Allah! Include me among his (a.s.) helpers, aides and protectors and among those who hasten to fulfill his commands and obey his orders. Include me among his adherents - those who vie with each other to fulfill his wishes and intentions and attain martyrdom in his presenceAameen!

Exegesis Of Ziyarat-e-Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) Recited On Fridays

Peace be upon you. May Allah hasten the covenant He has made with you concerning (His) help and the establishment of the affairs!

(Ziarat of Imam Zamana (a.s.) on Friday)

Even though the word "ajjil" over here is used in the past tense, yet its meaning is similar to the word "swalle" which has been used in the preceding sentence in the form of a supplication.

The word "ajjil" is derived from the root "A-j-l", which means 'to hasten,' or 'to hurry! Further, "ajjil" is the first seegah of the past tense. in 'Bab-e-Taf'eel'. Raaghib Isfahani mentions in his book Al-Mufradaat that its meaning is 'to intend or seek resolutely for a thing before its fixed time!

In this sentence the reader of this ziyarat implores, o Allah, Hasten his (a.s.) reappearance and (Your) help.

Before we proceed, let's briefly elaborate on the words "ajjil" and "ta'jeel" .

A) The significance of praying for the early reappearance of Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.):

The happiness and satisfaction of Imame-Zamana (a.s.) is the greatest desire of an individual who is awaiting his (a.s.) reappearance and the most painful thoughts for a believer are concerning the difficulties and troubles endured by Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.) during occultation.

Thus, the most important responsibility for a believer is to perform - to the best of his abilities - deeds which stave-off the troubles, worries and problems surrounding his Imam (a.s.) and he is not lax in fulfilling his duty in this regard.

With this backdrop, it's imperative to understand that the best thing that will please Hazrat Vali-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is to receive Allah's permission for appearance. In it lies not only his (a.t.f.s.) happiness but also that of the Messengers (a.s.), Imams (a.s.) and other believing men and women.

The most effective way of achieving this objective is through supplications. Praying for the early reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) in this era of occultation is a result of one's intense love and recognition. Without regularly praying for his reappearance, the claims of mastership, love and recognition ring hollow.

Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) himself has taught his friends this beautiful practice. No sooner was he (a.s.) born, he went into prostration - raised his index finger skywards and after bearing witness to all things, he prayed:

"..O Allah! Fulfil the covenant that you made with me."

(Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 51, p. 13)

Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) says: "O Ahmad Ibn Is'haaq! I swear by Allah, he will go in occultation. None will remain safe in this era (of occultation) except the one whom Allah has kept firmly rooted in the belief of his (a.s.) Imamate and has granted him the grace to pray for his early reappearance."

(Kamaaluddin, chapter 38, vol. 1)

B) No contradiction between hastening (Ta'jeel) and submission (Tasleem)

Ta'jeel means to pray for an early reappearance. Here, a question may crop up in the mind, 'Isn't praying for an early reappearance opposing Divine predestination (qaza wa qadar) concerning this matter?'

The reply is, 'To pray for an early reappearance is in fact a direct consequence of the faith in Allah's supremacy and infinite authority. He himself has commanded us to beseech Him. Then, to implore Allah is every servant's duty while to mould the destiny is Allah's prerogative. It is the servant's duty to submit and accept the decree of Allah. There isn't any kind of conflict here.

The point will become clear with the help of an example. Suppose a person is affected with an illness. His near and dear ones pray fervently for his recovery, but he passes away. Now, the family members surrender to the divine decree. Is there any contradiction in this? Certainly not! In fact not praying to Allah for the recovery of an ailing person is not to be construed as a sign of submission (to Allah's Will). On the contrary it's a sign of being haughty and needless of Allah.

C) The difference between hastening (TA'JEEL) and seeking haste (ISTE-JAAL)

As it has been discussed before - praying for the 'hastening' (TA'JEEL) of the reappearance of Imam (a.s.) has been appreciated in traditions. For instance Imam (a.s.) says:

"And pray excessively for the hastening of my reappearance. For in it lies your deliverance."

(Mikyaal al-Makaarim, vol. 2)

The reason for this is that a person should never feel hopeless and miserable waiting for the reappearance of Imam (a.s.). His eyes should await the coming of his Master (a.s.) every morning and evening. He should keep praying for his (a.s.) early reappearance. To consider the reappearance of Imam-eZamana (a.s.) as imminent is a sign of complete faith in Allah's promise. .

What is meant by 'seeking haste' (Ist'jaal)?

In certain cases, the infallible Imam(a.s.) have condemned hastiness and those in a hurry. For instance Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says:

HALAKAT AL-HAHAADHEEROON "The Mahaadheeroon shall be annihilated."

The narrator asked Imam (a.s.), "Who are the MAHAADHEER?"

Imam (a.s.) replied: "Those who make haste (al - Musta'jeloon)"

Then Imam (a.s.) further added: "And the ones who reckon the reappearance to be near will get salvation."

(Al Ghaybah of al-Numani (r.a.), Chapter 11, H. 5)

Come let us analyse this splendid tradition. "**MAHAADHEER**" is the plural of "**MAHDHAR**" and in Arabic it refers to a horse that gallops swiftly. Here, however, it means those who make haste. The infinitive of "**ALMUSTA JELOON**" (those who make haste) is "Ist'jaal" (seeking haste)

which in actuality implies 'to show dissent with the command and will of Allah with regards to the reappearance of Imam (a.s.). But to consider the reappearance of Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.) as near is in itself a sign of submission. Not only is Allah happy with such an act (of awaiting the reappearance of Imam (a.s.)) but also the infallible Imams (a.s.) have approved of it.

What's more, if the reappearance of Imam (a.s.) is perceived to be far-off- even if it is for a fleeting moment - then this act is enumerated as a great sin because it is a sign of being despondent of Allah's mercy.

That said, there's one very important issue which needs to be addressed here. To reckon the time of reappearance to be near doesn't mean that we fix a time for his (a.s.) reappearance. Those who do such a thing have been termed as liars in the traditions of Imam (a.s.).

Therefore, those who speak about the signs and in doing so tell the people that the reappearance will happen today, tomorrow or coming Friday have themselves gone astray. They are also deviating and corrupting others because fixing a time for reappearance will cause false hope and despair.

D) Commendable hastiness and forbidden hastiness

Before we wrap up the discussion, we think it is essential to reply to Raaghib Isfahani's view under the word "ajjil". Raaghib says, "Since this word is used an expression for 'self desire', thus in all places in the Quran - wherever it has been used - this act has been condemned. To the extent that it has become a proverb 'Hastiness is from the works of Shaitan'. To support his view, he even brings forth a couple of verses from the Holy Quran. However, Raaghib has missed the fact that "ajjil" has one more synonym in the Holy Quran which has been praised.

For example, Allah says: **"WA SAARE'OO ILAL MAGHFERATE"**,

And run speedily towards the forgiveness of your Lord.

(Surah Aale Imran: Verse 133)

Or Allah says: **"WA YOSAARE'OON FIL KHAIRAAT"**

And they run fast towards charity.

(Surah Anbiya: Verse 90)

In this verse Hazrat Zakariyyah (a.s., his wife and his son Hazrat Yahya (a.s.) are being lauded for rushing towards good deeds.

Hence, if rushing, hastiness and hurrying are for the sake of good actions then there is no evil in it. The Holy Quran itself has commanded the believers to rush towards goodness.

"And hurry towards good actions."

(Surah Baqarah: Verse 148) E).

Pray for the sake of reappearance or for the love of worldly power?

Before concluding, it is worth reiterating that the essence of waiting for the reappearance of Imam (a.s.) isn't about a person hoping to gain worldly power or authority. Instead, the aim is to see the Ahlul Bait (a.s.) and their followers attain happiness and bliss irrespective of us personally getting some status or position.

Abu Baseer asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.):

May I be sacrificed for you, when will there be comfort?

Imam (a.s.) replied: "O Abu Baseer, are you from those who crave for this world? Whoever acquires knowledge of this affair (Imamat and wilayat); his awaiting itself will become the cause of his deliverance."

(Al Ghayba of an-Numani (r.a.), chapter 25, H. 3)

The other important word in this sentence of the ziyarat is "V-A-D" i.e. promise. The reappearance of Imam-e-Asr (a.s.) is a divine promise and Allah never breaks His promise. The time of reappearance can defer but reappearance itself can not be annulled because it is a Divine promise.

Abu Hashim Ja'fari asked Imam Mohammad Taqi al-Jawad (a.s.):

"Can the rise of Qaem be deferred?." Imam (a.s.) replied:

"Verily (the rising of) Qaem is a promise of Allah and He never goes against His promise."

(Al Ghayba of an-Numani (r.a.), chapter 18, H. 10)

What has Allah promised Imam-e-Asr (a.s.)? This is a question which rises in light of the above sentences. Here the two things which come are discussed – divine help and establishing of the affairs. Since we have already discussed about the reign of Aale Muhammad (a.s.) in our earlier issues, hence, we'll restrict our discussions on the matter of divine help.

Divine Help

This topic is so vast that even an entire book may not do justice to it. But considering the limitations and conciseness of this article, we'll restrict ourselves to a few verses from the Holy Quran to augment our discussion.

1) Successful is he who has Allah's help

"And We helped them, so they overcame."

(Surah al-Saaffat: Verse 116)

2) Allah helps whomsoever He wishes

"Allah strengthens with His help whom He pleases."

(Surah Aale Imran: Verse 13)

(There are a thousand meanings hidden in a small part of this magnificent verse. The meek shouldn't feel disappointed awaiting divine help and the powerful shouldn't be proud and arrogant of their wealth and power)

3. The Almighty Allah's help is encompassing

"And that Allah may help you with a complete help."

(Surah Fath: Verse 3)

4) When Allah helps then none can **overpower us**

"If Allah helps you, none can overwhelm you: If He forsakes you, who is there, after that, who can help you? In Allah, then, let the believers put their trust." .

(Surah Aale Imran: Verse 160)

5) True help is only from Allah

"...there is no help except from Allah. The Exalted, the Wise."

(Surah Aale Imran: Verse 126)

6) It is the custom of the Prophets (a.s.) to seek Allah's help "He (H.Nuh) said: O My Lord, help me as they deny me."

(Surah Mominoon: Verse 26)

"He (H. Lut) prayed: O My Lord! Help me against the mischievous nation."

(Surah Ankabut: Verse 30)

"Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden (of bliss) without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and those of faith who were with him cried: "When (will come) the help of Allah?" Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is (always) near!"

(Surah Baqarah: Verse 214)

7) Ways of attaining Divine Help

Different verses of Holy Quran have mentioned the reasons through which the human race is deserving of Allah's help. Keeping brevity in mind, we enlist a few.

a) Faith:

Allah the Almighty has promised in the Holy Quran that He will help the believers. In fact He has considered this as His duty. He says:

"...to help the believers is ever incumbent upon us."

(Surah Rome: Verse 47)

b) Help Allah and He will you

"O those who believe! If you help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you and make your feet steadfast."

(Surah Muhammad: Verse 7)

In this verse an additional condition, besides faith mentioned in order to receive divine assistance - and that is to support Allah. The question here: Is the One who is Needless of anything in the universe dependent on our help? Is Allah the Almighty in need of our help and support? Not really. Here the meaning of helping Allah means helping Allah's divine proof – i.e. to help Imam-e-Asr (a.s.); to help the religion of Allah.

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Those who helped Imam Husain (a.s.) and sacrificed their life for him in Kerbala, in fact have helped the religion of Allah. It is for this reason that in ziyaarat we remember them with these words

"Peace be upon you all O the helpers of the religion of Allah!. Peace be upon you all; O the helpers of Messenger of Allah!"

It should be borne in mind that just as Allah is independent of anyone's help, likewise Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.), too, are not dependent on anyone. For, these are the individuals upon whom Allah has conferred "mastership in the world of creation" (Wilayat-e-Takweeni). It means they have unlimited authority over the universe. Yet Allah has made it incumbent upon man to help and support them in order to test humankind. Whoever helps them has indeed helped Allah and His religion. What's more, to help them is the best form of worship. We find in Holy Quran:

"Nay! If you remain patient and are on your guard, and they come upon you in a headlong manner, your Lord will assist you with five thousand of the havoc-making angels."

(Surah Aale Imran: Verse 125)

If a believer bears these qualities then Allah, according to His promise, will surely help him even though the great remnant of Allah, Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.) possess these qualities exist in him to the peak of perfection. Allah will certainly assist him (a.s.) and also those who shall support him (To be continued.... Inshallah) ·

Raj'at (To Return)

Introduction

The belief of Raj'at is one of the hotly debated topics in Islam and religious scholars as well as Quranic commentators have put forth their views and opinions concerning it. They consider Raj'at to be an extension of the "theory of reincarnation" or the "theory of the cycle of human life". They have pushed the limits of their intellect and have exhausted all their arguments and reasoning in order to justify and explain the belief of 'Raj'at'

After being submerged in the whirlpool of views and counter views, the belief in Imam Mahdi (a.s.) has emerged as a universal principle. It has soothed the heart of a distressed world and is proving to be a beacon for the survival of human race. It is proving to be the source of strength for facing insurmountable challenges and for making things possible. The honest and conscientious ones are inching towards this light.

The tranquil heart is bolstered with a new lease of life through the belief in Raj'at. This is because the proponents of this belief (of Raj'at) have convincing arguments along with manifest evidences. Clear indications in heavenly books as well the revered words, impeccable character and chaste actions of our infallible leaders (a.s.), have put a stamp of authenticity on this belief. Thus, it is possible for every impartial and unbiased individual to accept this belief.

Unfortunately, the majority amongst the Muslims chose to shun the radiant path of the Holy Quran and traditions (ahadith) and thus regarded Raj'at as impossible. Consequently, this divine grace (of belief in Raj'at) is found only amongst the followers of Imam Ali (a.s.) and it has been possible only due to the unstinting and relentless efforts of our great scholars of the past who have elucidated this belief and have presented it to us like precious pearls of the ocean.

With this intention we would, as a preamble, like the readers to acquaint themselves with those unique qualities of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.) that will enlighten us on the subject of Raj'at.

Preface

Before we get on with the actual discussion, we would like to present a few points as a prelude to our esteem readers. It should be borne in mind that the points in this preface are gleaned from authentic narrations.

- It is imperative and obligatory to accept whatever has been narrated by the infallible Imams (a.s.).
- It is mandatory to refer to the infallible Imams (a.s.) in all matters of jurisprudence
- Instead of rejecting ambiguous and apparently contradictory traditions, we should analyse them in the light of the Holy Quran.
- If two traditions appear to be contradictory, then we must accept the one upon which there is a consensus among a majority of the Shia scholars.
- We should refer to reliable Shia books of traditions whenever the need arises.

Lexical Meaning

Al-Jawhari in al-Sehaah and Raaghib Isfahaani in al-Qamoos have written the following statement concerning 'Raj'at'. "So-and-so believes in Raj'at". It means that "so-and-so" believes that he will return back to life in this world after his death. Hence, 'Raj'at' implies the returning back to life after death, but prior to the Day of Reckoning.

Rajat - In the light of terminology and traditions (ahaadees)

In the light of the traditions of Ahle Bayt (a.s.), the Shia firmly believe that Allah the Exalted will bring back to life some people in the same form in which they had existed in the world. After their "return" (i.e. Raj'at), He will chastise some of them while He will honour and reward some others. He will let truth prevail over falsehood and extract justice and revenge for the ones who were oppressed, from their oppressors. All this will occur during the reign of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). But 'Raj'at' will be only for those who were either at the pinnacle of certitude (in Allah) or in the abyss of misguidance and deviation.

The Shias are distinct and unique in the belief of Raj'at. No scholar from Ahle Sunnah subscribes to this doctrine. The evidence we have concerning Raj'at is not from our side. Rather we only mention whatever the Holy Quran and Ahle Bayt (a.s.) have narrated to us. For, they (a.s.) are not deeply rooted in knowledge, but are also the (true) interpreters and teachers of the Holy Quran. Besides, they are the rightful inheritors of the knowledge of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

Proof on the Reality of Raj'at

There are numerous proofs on the reality of Raj'at. It has been unanimously and successively proved that the belief in Raj'at is included among "necessary beliefs of religion". Here, we will enumerate each one of them.

(A) Raj'at - In the light of the Holy Quran

Numerous verses of the Holy Quran either directly prove the veracity of Raj'at, or point towards it through other verses or traditions.

1. Surah Baqarah, verse No 259 "Or the like of him who passed by a town, and it had fallen down upon its roofs; he said: When will Allah give it life after its death? So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him to life. He said: How long have you tarried? He said: I have tarried a day, or a part of a day. Said He: Nay! you have tarried a hundred years; then look at your food and drink - years have not passed over it; and look at your donkey; and that we may make you a sign to men, and look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothed them with flesh; so when it became clear to him, he said: I know that Allah has power over all things."

This verse categorically states that Allah gave death to this person for a hundred years and brought him back to life in this world. It's apparent from the Holy Quran that the person was a Prophet and that is why Allah addressed him via revelations. Some traditions inform us that it was Prophet Irmiya (a.s.) while some suggests it was Hazrat Uzair (a.s.). What's more, both - Shias and Sunnis - have acknowledged this tradition. Also it is mentioned in traditions, that

whatever befell on the past nations will also occur for the nation of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). Raj'at also is one of those things.

2. Surah Baqarah, verse 243 "Have you not considered those who went forth from their homes, for fear of death, and they were thousands, then Allah said to them, Die; again He gave them life; most surely Allah is Gracious to people, but most people are not grateful."

This verse too underlines the fact that in a bygone era some people were brought back to life in this world after their death. Therefore, Raj'at is not a probability. Rather it is a reality that cannot be rejected and whatever has occurred in the previous nations will recur in the present nation (of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.)).

Keeping in view the eloquence of the Holy Quran, it can be said that this is the best proof on the authenticity of Raj'at. Moreover, it has come in traditions that their numbers (who were given life after death) was 70,000. By the command of Allah they remained dead for a long period of time after which they were brought back to life. And after returning to this world they continued living in it for a long time.

3. Surah Ghaafir, verse 51 "Surely We will help Our Messengers and those who believe, in the present life and upon the day when the witnesses arise."

Innumerable traditions confirm that verse implies Raj'at and the apparent meaning of the verse too affirms these narrations. For, many Prophets, Imams and believers were not helped in this world while the verse declares that Allah will help them. Allah will never go against His promise.

However, this verse cannot be interpreted to justify the reappearance of Imam-eZamana (a.t.f.s). Because that would require us to detach ourselves from the context in which this verse was revealed and rely solely on the metaphorical meaning.

4. Surah Ghafir, verse 11 "They shall say, 'Our Lord, Thou hast caused us to die twice and caused us to live twice; now we confess our sins. is there a way to escape this?'"

Numerous narrations have come in this regard that say that out of the two (death and life), one of them is associated to Raj'at. It is evident that the intention of this is not impossible. This does not imply there is a set limit concerning the second life or death. Being brought back to life from the grave cannot be considered as complete life by itself. Thus, it would be incorrect to say that two lives mean "life in the grave and coming back to life in the Hereafter and two deaths mean death in this world and death in the grave."

Besides these, there are many verses of the Holy Quran that confirm Rajat.

(B) Raj'at - In the light of traditions (ahaadees)

The traditions concerning Raj'at have been mentioned so frequently and consecutively that they have reached the level of "tawatur" (continuity) and hence cannot be denied. However, one can find traditions concerning Raj'at under different subjects and topic. Some traditions speak about the Raj'at of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.), while some mention about the return (Raj'at) of the Infallible Imams (a.s.). Some state that Raj'at will be there for the past Prophets (a.s.) while some talk about the Raj'at of some special group of Shias. Yet others speak of those who were either at the pinnacle of faith or in the depths of deviation.

It should be borne in mind that wherever Raj'at has been discussed, it does not imply that only their qualities or their rule will return. Rather, they themselves will come back in person flesh, bones and spirit. Or else it will be absolutely wrong and contrary to the narrations concerning the reality of Raj'at. For, Raj'at is connected to the last era but noble characteristics and attributes are not specific to the last era only. In fact these qualities were always witnessed since the time of creation of Prophet Adam (a.s.). Every Prophet and his successor has been the heir of the traits and virtues of their predecessors and past Prophets. Rather even their companions, too, have been the bearers of the characteristics of their righteous forefathers. .

We now analyze a few traditions concerning the different aspects of Raj'at.

1. The author of Majma' al-Bayaan, Fadhl ibn Hasan al-Tabrisi under verse 83 of Surah Nami, 'On the day We will bring forth a troop from every nation...' writes:

'There are many traditions from the infallible Imams (a.s.) that state that during the rising of Imam Mahdi (a.s.), Allah will bring back to life his (a.s.) followers who passed away earlier so that they're rewarded with the status of being among his (a.s.) helpers. These Shias will be extremely thrilled to see the establishment of Imam's (a.s.) government.

Similarly, some of his (a.s.) enemies too will be brought back to life in this world so that they are given a part of their quota of chastisement. Finally, after facing a lot of humiliation and disgrace in the world, they will be killed by the soldiers of Imam (a.s.).

(Al-Iqaaz, p. 250)

2. Sa'd ibn Abdillah in Mukhtasar al-Basair while narrating from Bukair Ibn A'yoon says, 'The thing in which I don't have an iota of doubt is the saying of Imam Baqir (a.s.) wherein he (a.s.) says, "There will be Raj'at for Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and Ameerul Momineen (a.s.)"

(Al-Iqaaz, p. 379)

3. Ali Ibn Ibrahim narrates from Abu Baseer *that Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said: "Once Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) told Imam Ali (a.s.) that 'In the last era, Allah will bring you back to life in the best of appearances while you will have an iron with which you will punish your enemies."*

(Al-Iqaaz, p. 257)

4) Imam Sadiq (a.s.) while interpreting this verse: "And remember the time when Allah took a covenant from all the Prophets that I have given you of book and wisdom; then there shall come to you a messenger confirming what is with you — you shall believe in him and help him..."

(Surah Aale Imran: Verse 81)

says: "From the time of Hazrat Adam until now, Allah has not sent any Messenger except that he (a.s.) will come back in this world and assist the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and Ameerul Momineen (a.s.)"

(Al-Iqaaz, p. 332)

5. In Kitab-ul-Ghaibat, Shaikh Tusi (a.r.) narrates from Mufazzal ibn Umar:

'We were in the holy presence of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) and were discussing about Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and about those who will depart from this world waiting for his reappearance. Imam

(a.s.) said: "When he (a.s.) will rise, he will go at the graves of the believers and say, "O person, your Imam has appeared. If you so wish, come with your Imam or if you want, rest in the grace and enjoy the bounty of your Lord."

There are numerous reports that establish Raj'at not only as a correct and divine belief but also amongst the necessities of the Shia faith. The Shias are identified and recognized by this.

In this respect, Tabrisi in Ehtejaaj and Najaashi in his Rijaal have cited an interesting incident. Najaashi writes that Imam Sadi (a.s.) had a companion by the name of Momin-e-Taaq. He was renowned for his knowledge, piety and fame. Once Abu Hanifa asked him, "Do you believe in Raj'at?" He replied: "Of course". Abu Hanifa said: "Then remove five hundred dinars from your pocket and give it to me as a loan. When i return to the world for the second time (in Raj'at), I will repay you back." Promptly, Momin-e-Taaq replied, "For this you need to give me a guarantee that you'll return like a human. I fear that you may return in some other form and I will be unable to recover my money."

Mention of Raj'at in supplications and ziyaaraat

If the important actions and supplications are to be closely studied, one will find Rajat mentioned in most of them. Furthermore, there is an emphasis in all of them to have a firm belief in it.

1. in the supplications for the month of Rajab, Shaikh Tusi (a.r.) narrates in his book Misbaah from Husain ibn Rauh (a.r.): "In whichever place of ziyarat you are present, say this ...salutations, peace and Allah's blessings be upon you till the time I reach in your service again during your Raj'at and when I am included in your army.

2. Ziyaarat of Imam Husain (a.s.): Shaikh Kulayni (a.r.) narrates under the chapter of Ziyaarat of imam Husain (a.s.) that *Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says: "And when you are at the grave of Imam Husain (a.s.) then say: "I bear witness that I keep faith in you and I firmly believe in your Raj'at."*

Ibn Qulwayh (a.r.), too, has chronicled this tradition in his book Mazaar.

3. Ziyaarat-e-Jaameah: Shaikh Sadooq (a.r.) in his books Man la yahdhuruhu al-faqih and Uyoon-o-Akhbar al Reza (a.s.); Shaikh Tusi (a.r.) in Tehzeeb have narrated from reliable sources that Imam Ali an-Naqi (a.s.) says in Ziyaarat-e-Jaameah: "I acknowledge your status and position, I am certain of your Raj'at and I confirm your promised return. I am spending my life waiting for your reign and government..... May Allah include me among those who will be reckoned as your adherents and who *will govern in your reign."*

4. *Recommended Acts of Worship for Friday: Shaikh Tusi (a.r.) has written in Misbaah: Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says: The one who wants to do ziyaarat of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) and Janabe Zahra (s.a.) or anyone of us, he should perform ghusl and say...*

I am with all of you and not with your enemies. I submit to your excellence and accept your Raj'at - I don't deny the power of Allah.

Objections concerning Raj'at

Without understanding the meaning and essence of the traditions of Ahle Bayt (a.s.), the denier of Raj'at have either rejected it outright or have compelled themselves to analyze and rationalize the traditions, notwithstanding the unanimity and firm belief of the infallible Imams (a.s.) and the Shia scholars concerning Raj'at.

Following are the answers to the few objections raised by the antagonist of Raj'at.

1. In his book Fajr al-Islam, Ahmed Ameen writes that due to their belief in Raj'at, the school of Shiasim resembles Judaism

Answer: If believing in Raj'at makes the Shia religion similar to Judaism, then the Holy Quran itself reflects Judaism ideology. For, in the earlier part of this article, we have mentioned not one but four verses of Quran (among the many) that vouch for the veracity of Raj'at...

According to the aforementioned author, a lot of Islamic laws and beliefs bear resemblance to those in Judaism and Christianity since the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has endorsed many laws from those divine religions. Thus, it is obvious that certain Islamic beliefs will mirror tenets of Judaism and Christianity. But if the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has not found any fault or defect in them, then what authority does a follower of Islam have to raise his own opinion contrary to that of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.)?

2. Raj'at is impossible

The reason given by the deniers for eschewing Raj'at is that they feel Raj'at is impossible and unlikely because such things are difficult to comprehend for the weak minds.

Replies:

a) To consider something as impossible and unlikely isn't a valid or logical argument and cannot be compared to the real proof

b) Raj'at isn't impractical. Rather, it is possible because in the light of the Holy Quran it has occurred earlier and the biggest proof of something being possible is its occurrence.

c) Such things are of no significance in the presence of the favours and kindness of Ahle Bayt (a.s.) and in front of the Infinite power of Allah the belief in Raj'at is absolutely correct. In his book Fazaailul Aimmah (a.s.), Hafiz Rajab Borsi has reported amazing traditions concerning the superiority of Ahle Bait (a.s.).

He writes: A person who had a heart ailment rejected this tradition (about Raj'at). I said, 'Do you deny the power and bounties of Allah or do you reject the Infallible Imam (a.s.)? If you deny the power of Allah, then consider the huge fish in the time of Prophet Sulayman (a.s.). It swallowed the entire food that was kept on the tablecloth at one go while that food was for an entire month. Then it said, 'This? This is just a small portion of our daily share.' A dazed Hazrat Suleiman (a.s.) asked: 'Are there any more fishes like you in the ocean?' The fish replied: 'There are thousands like us:

Sulayman (a.s.) exclaimed, 'Allah is a Marvelous King. He is Pure from all kinds of defects He creates things which none is aware of.

2. The traditions on Raj'at are not found in reliable books. Besides, their numbers are not enough for one to have absolute faith in them.

Reply: Traditions on Raj'at can be found extensively in the books of reliable authors. Rather, they have attained consecutiveness (tawaatur). Allama Tabatabai (r.a.) has written in his famous exegesis of the Holy Quran, Al-Mizan Fi Tafseer al-Quran that traditions concerning Raj'at have been mentioned consecutively by the Ahle Bayt (a.s.)

In al-Iqaaz, the celebrated and great scholar Shaikh Hurr al-Aameli (r.a.) has enumerated a long list of scholars along with the names of their books who have written about Raj'at. Allama Majlisi (r.a.) writes: "If this isn't consecutiveness (tawaatur), then what is?"

Therefore, we can easily conclude that the reports found on Raj'at are absolutely irrefutable and unassailable.

(References: Al-Iqaaz minal Hujjat bil Burhan Alal Raj'at by Shaikh Hurr Aameli (a.r.), Aayatul Ma'aref alal hayaat, Behar al-Anwaar, vol. 53)

What Does Our Imam (a.s.) Expect From His Shias

Let's deliberate on a few things about our Imam (a.s.). But before we discuss as to what our Imam (a.s.) expects from us, let us understand and comprehend the status of our Imam. Who is he and what is his position? What is the magnitude of his lofty position? Though he is staying on the earth, what is his relation with the skies? What are his powers? Here, our discussion will centre on his authority and power in the sphere of religion rather than his powers in the domain of the universe. We shall initiate our discussion on Imam (a.s.) from the general conversations that people have in their daily lives about him (a.s.).

Imam

Literally, Imam means "leader". Here, Imams imply the twelve infallible guides (a.s.) who are the protectors of the religion of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) after him. The first among them is Ameerul Momeneen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and the last is Imam Mahdi (a.s.), who ascended to the seat of Imamate in the year 260 AH after the martyrdom of his venerable father, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Presently, he is the divine guardian of Islam and the master of all affairs. He is the Proof of Allah on the earth. He is the Wali and Caliph appointed by Allah. He is infallible and possessor of authority. He is the living Imam and our leader, who loves his followers. He is the sign and manifestation of the power, perfection and glory of Allah, the Most High. Enumerating his authority is beyond human intellect, imagination and thinking. Our duty is just to ponder over his perfections and glory as narrated by our great scholars and the prophecies of our Imams (a.s.) about him. We must recite the various supplications and salutations that bring us closer to him and this is a path through which his recognition can be acquired. By reciting them regularly, we seek refuge in him (a.s.) from the scorching heat of deviation. We present a salutation for our readers through which we can comprehend the greatness, grace and glory of our Imam (a.s.) and his holy existence which has authority over the entire universe. His existence is the cause of the continuation of the worlds and the axis of order in the universe. The salutation is available in Mafaatihul Jinan and is as follows:

SALAAMULLAH KAAMIL-UT-TAAMM ASHSHAAMIL AAMM WA

He is the Proof of Allah and His Wali on His Earth and His cities. And he is His Caliph on His Creations and His servants.

Shiah

"Shiah" refers to the person who belongs to the sect that follows the twelve Imams (a.s.). Literally, Shiah means "a follower". Shiah is the one who does not rebel against the orders of his leader. Neither does he doubt the authority of his Imam (a.s.) nor is he negligent in the obedience and submission towards his Imam. A Shiah will be called a true Shiah only when he is prepared to obey the King of the time i.e. Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.). He is ever willing to recompense the bounty of love (Mawaddat) granted to him by Allah.

The intense love for his imam (a.s.) keeps the flames of sacrifice burning in his heart.

The Imam of the time - because of whom the order in the universe is not shattered - has some expectations and demands from his Shiahs. If all the Shiahs - from the lowest to the highest - are conscious and mindful towards those wishes and demands of Imam (a,s), then protection

and safety from the side of Imam (a.s.) is automatically assured. But if, God forbid, the situation is contrary, then the turbulent circumstances of the present era would destroy them. And Allah - the Mighty Lord - chastises the proud.

A detailed discussion about his expectations from the Shiah is not possible over here. However, some things can be mentioned in a very concise and summarized manner. If these advices were to enter the heart, then a crevice would open in the heart through which some rays of light, fragrant breezes, comforting sounds - all of them emanating from the tent of Imam (as) can be felt. They would be the bearers of glad tidings leading to an extraordinary relation between a loving nation and its affectionate Imam (a.s.).

What does the Imam want from his Shiah? A lot has been written on this matter. The tauqees - letters of Hazrat Hujjat (as) to his representatives and trusted people through the special deputies in the minor occultation - offer an idea of his expectations. This has been explained in detail by our scholars right from the early centuries till date. The conclusion all those letters is that a Shiah is always expected to lead a life within the boundaries of religion and to follow all religious laws meticulously to the best of his ability. He should endeavor to help Imam (a.s.) and in this regard he should never be negligent of his (a.s.) guidance for the sake of the reformation of the society. The pillars of this guidance are four - knowledge, faith, recognition and affection. This can be explained in simple language as, knowing, believing, recognizing and loving. These are the elements for perfection of Shiahism. Through them, a Shiah achieves exalted positions - as can be seen from the lives of Rushaid Hujri, Habib ibn Mazaahir and Meesam-e-Tammaar. We will take a glance of these four characteristics:

First: Knowledge and Awareness

Awareness means to be engrossed in research and investigation.

- Imam Asr (as) is behind the veil of occultation. But his (a.s.) blessed birth and the five years which he spent under the guardianship of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) should be based on belief through solid proofs which our eleventh Imam had established during his Imamate.
- It also means that one should inquire and know about those respected personalities who were the confidantes of Imam (a.s.) and worked for him (a.s.) in various capacities in the reign of his Imamate like Ahmad Ibn Is'haaq, Abdullah ibn Sa'd, Kaafur Ghulam, etc.
- To know the circumstances surrounding his rise to the position of Imamate and how the Almighty Allah kept His lamp of guidance burning, and arranged for such a protection that the rebellious powers of that time could not extinguish the light of guidance. The minor occultation of Imam Asr (as) lasted for 69 years. The special representatives, who were his ministers and had links to his Shiah, were vigilant, pious, steadfast, watchful, prepared, ready for action, a complete picture of faith, the custodians of Imam's secrets, treasurers of the knowledge of Imamate, aware of the traps laid by the enemies, guardians of scholars, the conveyors of answers to the queries of the masses and observant of daily events. The major occultation began in 329 A.H.

Then came great scholars like Sheikh Sadooq (a.r.), Sayyed Muhammad Mahdi Bahrul Uloom (a.r.), Sheikh Hurre Aameli (a.r.), Maula Baqir Majlisi (a.r.), etc. We should strive to know more about them and make efforts to model our lives on their way of life. This is what our Imam (a.t.f.s.) wants.

- Further we should also be aware of the circumstances towards the end of the period of minor occultation. Our Imam (as) wrote a letter to his last special deputy Ali ibn Muhammad Seymouri conveying that the period of the minor occultation was coming to an end and the major occultation was about to begin. The door to special representation was being closed. "Your life is only for six more days. Do not appoint any successor. Now our scholars will be our representatives."

Every Shiah should know how the reign of Bani Abbas was a period of deception for the Shiahs. How their evil strategies were creating newer discords and problems for the followers of Ahle Bait (a.s.). On one hand were the economic difficulties for the Shiahs. On the other hand the prophetic teachings and traditions - whose guardians are the 12 Infallible Imams (a.s.) - were being manipulated and distorted to suit the self interest of the rulers. In this manner, Islam was portrayed as a religion of kingship and royalty, a belief that gradually percolated among the masses. This approach later transformed into that of terror and bloodshed and was made to appear as a part of Islam.

This thinking and approach has continued from the times of Bani Umayya and Bani Abbas.

Islam's enemies have long taken benefit of this bloody and merciless facet. The continued existence of the Shiah community is due to the divine wisdom and blessings of our Infallible Imams (as). It shows how the Imams have protected the Islamic laws from distortions. If the Shiahs do not travel through history, how will they know about the efforts and sacrifices of our Imams and our scholars in protecting and guiding our nation and safeguarding its intellectual heritage? It is rightly said "The sweat of a labourer is more precious and worthier than the treasures of a king." This Shiah nation is the result of the laborious prayers of a lady who beseeched for it in front of her Lord. She is the Lady of Paradise (s.a.). Her age was short but in this short lifespan, her prayers were accompanied by blisters in her hands and by broken ribs. At times, the prayers continued during the day and night along with fasting and tattered clothing. How will this nation realize the significance and worth of their legacy until they know and feel these facts? How will one realize the agony and pain of the sufferings of an infallible lady (s.a.) - who bore great hardships to hand over the sacred trust of the prophetic message to us Shiahs? It is necessary that each one of us should light the lamp of knowledge to know all this. Enroll in schools, visit libraries, respect social gatherings and bond with each other with sincerity. As Allama Iqbal, the poet of the East, says:

A man's value is only if he is attached to his religion. Alone he is of no significance.

Like a wave is only (of value) in the ocean, outside it is of no worth

Second: Faith

One must have correct and proper beliefs. Our Imam wants us to continuously update ourselves - through research and investigation - in the belief of Imamate to protect it from

doubts and uncertainties. If we feel an iota of doubt, we must go to the scholars (who are his (a.s.)) representatives. Acquire knowledge by attending their gatherings. When the truth is clear, say: "I have accepted you as the divine representative and my Imam after due study." Imam Asr (a.s.) wants this from us. For example, the writer had asked a great scholar sometime ago, 'In the elementary books of religious studies for children - the sentence 'God is One' is proved through an argument that if God were two or three or more then there would be definite discord between them and due to this, it is impossible for the system of the universe to subsist. Does this argument conclusively prove Allah's Oneness and make Divine Unity clear in the minds of the recipient? The great scholar replied: "Do you consider this proof as deficient and weak?" When requested to clarify the matter further, he said, "To understand the Oneness and Needlessness of Allah the High, this basic explanation is the first step, lucid and simple, which fuels the desire for further inquiry and research. Thus, we take a few steps towards the recognition of Allah. After this, we can understand more complex proofs and comprehend the terms." !

Hence, our Imam wants that we believe in our Lord, - not blindly but through research and study. And similarly understand and have faith in Imamate of the Infallible Caliphs and Guides of Allah, the One without any partner. Only then will it be possible for a person to remain safe from the affliction and calamities of the world by keeping away from his (a.s.) dissatisfaction.

Third – Recognition (Ma'refat)

The word ma'refat is not as simple as it sounds. It entails soaring to intellectuals heights, increasing the horizons of knowledge, purifying the self and the character, strict obedience to Divine laws and acquiring the light (of morality) within the conscience. In short, possessing all those noble qualities that help a Shiah safeguard his faith.

Turmoil and tribulations that would make others stumble and fall will not affect a Shiah who is resolute and steadfast because he always finds himself in the presence of Imam. (a.s.). Today, satanic institutions have opened innumerable avenues for sins. New fashions and trends have emerged to display nudity shamelessly and unabashedly. Hundreds of ways and means have been created to lure everyone.

A wise person, aware of the deceptions and allurements of the world will save himself. The world remains safe due to such noble and pure souls. The heavens do not rain chastisement nor does fire engulf the cities because of such upright and untainted individuals. Imam-e-Asr (a.s.) wants us to love him as well as the followers of truth. "It is through them that you will gain our ma'refat" he (a.s.) says. A Shiah knows that his Imam (as) is present and watching, and tries to mould his life according to the likes and wishes of his Imam (a.s.). Our Imam (a.s.) is the fountainhead of fatherly affection.

But a father expresses his love and affection according to his level of knowledge, wisdom and understanding and then bestows gifts. So, what is needed is that every Shiah should make himself worthy of the invaluable bounties of Imam. But if he does not possess ma'refat, he will fail to recognize the value of the bounty (of Imamate) nor will he be deserving of it. One should understand the rights of imamate if he is to gain ma'refat. Keep in mind that Imamate is the

pillar of religion. Every Shiah should gradually know about the effects, obligations and benefits of Imamate from an early age. This can be achieved through majalis, religious classes, paternal training in early childhood and the chastity of the mother's embrace. These are the means about which every member of a Shiah family should be aware. Its oversight results in deviation, misfortune, calamities and affliction. Sometimes we see the rich striding the world, carrying themselves in a high handed fashion. He may be given some time to reform. But if he remains ignorant, there will be no one to save him if he stumbles. This very wealth and money, which were his imaginary idols, will come crashing down on him. The writer is himself witness to such incidents. It will not be out of place to briefly mention such an event. It is about a small town. Years ago, the evening prayers had ended and the people sat listening to the advices of the scholar who led the prayers. He mentioned about some rich individuals living on the periphery of the mosque. Servants in uniform would always be around to serve them and their guests. Their boisterous laughter would echo all around and disturb the faithful in their prayers. The scholar admonished that these were the results of being oblivious to the commands of religion and hoarding of impure wealth. If there was fear of God in their hearts, they would have desisted from leaving the prayers and indulging in such unsavory acts.

Time passed and circumstances changed. Each one of them was afflicted with such difficulties that the pen trembles to put them on paper. This world is a place of taking lesson. Allah's help and the aid of Imam (as) descend on a nation only when it has an eagerness, awareness and inclination to strive towards truth. Otherwise, in the words of Allama Iqbal:

The nation which cannot awaken from its slumber Curse on such people, woe on such a nation

Hence, what is lacking in a person who achieves the light of ma'refat of Imam Asr (as)? He has everything. But if he does not have ma'refat, then what does he have? Nothing, except the gloom of deviation.

Fourth : Love (Mawaddat)

The fourth Imam (a.s.) wishes that all of us should love Imam Hujjat Ibn Al-Hasan Askari (a.s.) as he should be loved. When this love is absolute and unconditional, then there is a gradual increase in the love for Hazrat Hujjat (as). This continues till a time comes, as the poet describes eloquently, when even the starry night is a cause of pain (due to separation from beloved). The anxiety and restlessness due to the separation from the master is hard to bear. "Where are you, my Master, my leader and my protector? Whether you are far or near? I know not where you are." Why are we not able to see his light and smell the fragrance of his clothes? Why are we deprived of a glance at his resplendent visage? A true Shiah repeats his 'love' requesting patience and unrequited dreams- what will be the colour of the heart while the blood gushes through it'. Our Imam speaks to our hearts, "Be a part of my pain while praying for my reappearance, so that the desire for helping me keeps shining in your heart and spreads its fragrance." Our master and leader wishes all this from us. But, understanding the will of this noble being and approaching it, achieving his satisfaction and pleasure needs unbridled passion bordering on insanity, the like of which is seen in moths attracted to the flame and who annihilate themselves in it with a desire to sacrifice their lives.

When a Shiah exhibits the love for his Imam as wished by him (a.s.), he (a.s.) is pleased, happy and responds to all his invocations. He (as) says: 'Move ahead, a new world and pure surroundings awaits you.' The example of Ali Ibn Mahziyaar is before us. We know that we cannot become like Sheikh Murtuza Ansari (r.a.), Allama Hasan Hilli (r.a.), Allama Bahrul Uloom (r.a.) and Allama Hurr Aameli (r.a.). They were radiant emblems of religion who acquired their knowledge, belief and faith from the light of Imam (a.s.). Our Imam-who measures our love and sincerity on the benchmark of our capacity and ability - desires that we should not be negligent of him. He wishes that we should remember him incessantly - whether we are alone or in some gatherings. But this is only possible when the love is expressed by the heart and not by mere words, because words can never convey the intense emotions of the heart.

A group of Arab litterateurs visited the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and implored, "O Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.a.)! You have made great sacrifices and efforts in spreading Islam. You can ask for its recompense from us." The Prophet (s.a.w.a.) would have surely smiled at this. The one who is made as "a mercy upon the worlds" is being propositioned for compensation for all his struggles and efforts!!! That too by this needy and feeble man - unaware of his own condition and future!!! But the Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.a.) did not reject the offer. Rather he asked for a thing which resided in the hearts and could not be measured verbally. He asked for love and affection towards his near ones. Can anyone be closer to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) than H. Hujjat (a.t.f.s.), the son of J. Zahra (s.a.), the flower of Narjis (s.a.) and avenger of the blood of Imam Husain (a.s.)? His name is the name of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and his title is the title of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.). His discussion has crossed the lips of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) several times. Now, this recompense (in the form of proximity and affection of the Ahlul Bait (a.s.) of Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.)) is a clear distinction between truth and falsehood. The mention of this love lights up the eyes of some and brings a smile on the face while for others it is a cause of distress and grief. It is the effect of affection that a scholar in the throes of death says:

Why is death a harbinger of life? ; Who has blown this breeze, is it not you?

And there were some deniers of this recompense - like Yazid. He paced the corridors of his palace in loneliness, beating his head, pulling his hair, terrified of his end. He constantly imagined himself smoldering in the fire of hell

My Master! My loving Imam whose love surpasses that of a father for his child)! O Imam of the time! We are sinners; nevertheless, we grieve for your oppressed forefather Imam Husain (as). The name of your ancestor Husain (a.s.) triggers a flood of tears. Maula, we request you for the sake of these tears, that you overlook our faults and never deprive us of your fragrance. Nor lessen the intensity of your love that fills our hearts. Aameen!

Can We Pray To Imam (a.s.) For Our Needs?

Occasionally, there are questions that arise in some minds - "Can one seek our desires directly from the Imam?" or "Isn't the seeking of one's needs directly from the Imam tantamount to associating aught with Allah and polytheism?" or "Is it not against the concept of monotheism if we ask for our needs directly from Imam (a.s.)?" Here is a review of these questions and also their appropriate replies.

This world - A system of 'means' and 'end'

Allah, the Almighty, has fashioned the world in such a way that everything is achieved through some 'means' and 'causes'. None of our needs are fulfilled directly. Thirst is not quenched by itself. It is done through the medium of water. A child does not come into existence by itself. He is born through its parents. This is true for all other things as well.

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.) says, 'The wisdom of Allah does not permit that He completes an affair without means. He has ordained a cause for everything.'

(Al-Kafi; vol. 1, p. 183 H. 7)

Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Taalib (a.s.) said, "There is a means for everything."

(Ghurar al-Hekam, Saying no 7281)

Allah, the Almighty, while narrating the incident of Hazrat Zulqarnayn (a.s.) in the Holy Quran, says,

"Surely We established him in the land and granted him with the means for every thing."

(Surah Kahf: Verse 84)

On this basis, it is an established principle of the Holy Quran and traditions that the world is a system of 'ways! and 'means'. The achievement of any work through a medium is a divine law. Thus, it is the duty of every individual who believes in Allah, to tread the divine path and seek the solution to his problems through a medium.

The Creation of the Universe

If we study the traditions regarding the creation of the universe, the reality will emerge that Allah - the High - did not create everything directly and without means. Rather, He only created the pure 'light' of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and his Ahle Bait (a.s.) through His Will (Masheyyat). Thereafter, He gave existence to the rest of the creations through the medium of the 'light' of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and his Ahle Bait (a.s.) For the sake of brevity, we cite a few traditions on this subject:

1. Jaabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari (r.a.) asked the

Holy Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.a.), "What was the first creation of Allah? He (s.a.w.a.) replied, 'O Jaabir! Allah first created the light' of your Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and then He created all goodness from it."

(Beharul Anwaar, vol. 57, p. 170)

2. Abbas, the uncle of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), narrates that he (s.a.w.a.) said,

"O my respected uncle! Allah created us at a time when there was neither sky nor earth, nor Arsh nor Paradise nor Hell. We glorified Allah at the time when no (form of) glorification existed. We revered Him at a time when there was no (idea of) reverence. When Allah intended to create the creation, He: split my light' and created the 'throne' (Arsh) from it. The 'light' of the 'throne' is from my light' and my 'light' is from the 'light' of Allah. Hence I am superior to the 'throne.'

Then Allah split the light' of Ali (a.s.) and created the angels from it. The 'light' of the angels is from the light' of Ali Ibn Abi Taalib (a.s.). The light of Ali Ibn Abi Taalib is from the 'light' of Allah and hence Ali is superior to the angels.

Then Allah split the 'light' of my daughter Fatima (s.a.) and created the heavens and the earths from it. The light of the earths and the skies is from the light of my daughter Fatima (s.a.). The light' of Fatima (s.a.) is from the light' of Allah and Fatima (s.a.) is superior to the earth and the skies.

Then Allah split the light' of Hasan (a.s.) and created the sun and moon from it. The light of the sun and the moon is from the 'light' of Hasan. The 'light' of Hasan is from the 'light' of Allah and Hasan (a.s.) is superior to the sun and the moon. Then Allah split the 'light' of Husain (a.s.) and created paradise and the wide-eyed houries from it. The 'light' of paradise and the houries is from the light' of Husain (a.s.). The light' of Husain (a.s.) is from the 'light' of Allah and Husain (a.s.) is superior to paradise and the houries.

(Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 25, pp. 16-17)

3. Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) said,

"Allah the Almighty created us and created us in the best of forms. He fashioned our features and granted us the best characteristics. Then He appointed us as His representatives over His creation. He chose us as His tongue amongst His creation. He selected us as His hand of mercy and kindness amongst His servants; He chose us as the face through which one can recognise Him and His door thorough which one can approach Him. He appointed us the guardian of the treasures in His heaven and the earth.

It is on our account that the trees bear fruit, the fruits ripen and the river flow with abundant water. It is due to us that Allah sends down the rain from the skies and vegetation sprouts from the earth. Allah is (truly) worshipped on account of our worship. If we were absent, Allah would not be worshipped at all."

(Tauheed of Shaykh Sadooq (r.a.), p. 151, H. 8)

A tradition on this topic has been narrated by Ibn Ya'foor from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) which reinforces the subjects outlined in the above traditions,

"Allah created a creation and entrusted all the affairs of religions to it. We are that creation."

(Tauheed of Shaykh Sadooq (r.a.), p. 152, H. 9)

There are several narrations on this topic in books of traditions. For further study, one can refer to the traditions reported in Beharul Anwaar volumes 35 and 57, Ehqaqul Haq volumes 9 and 15, Usoole' Kafi volume 1, etc.

These traditions clarify the point completely that Allah the Almighty created this universe through the means of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and the Ahle Bait (a.s.). In fact, one can say that He created the entire universe through their 'light'.

Bounties on account of Ahle Bait (a.s.)

Allah the Almighty created the universe through the light of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and his blessed family (a.s.). Even today whatever bounties are granted to this universe, it is on account of the Ahle Bait (a.s.). This means that the role of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) was not limited only to the original creation of this universe. It is not that the universe, after its creation by the 'light' of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.), has become independent and that there is no role of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) in its continued existence. Rather, just as the universe is obliged to the Ahle Bayt (a.s.) for its creation, it is dependent upon them (a.s.) for its continued existence as well.

Abu Hamza al-Thumaali (r.a.) says that that once I asked Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a.s.), "Can this earth survive without the presence of an Imam?" He (a.s.) replied,

"If the earth is devoid of the Imam (a.s.), it will cave in and collapse."

(Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 179, H. 10)

Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) said, "If the earth is devoid of the presence of the Imam (a.s.), even for a single moment, it will consume all its inhabitants, just as the sea swallows the people."

(Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 179, H. 12)

Ziyaarat-e-Jaameah al-Kabeerah is a highly authentic and reliable ziyaarat. This ziyaarat is an ocean encompassing the merits and virtues of the Ahle Bayt (a.s.). Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.) has emphasised the regular recitation of this ziyaarat. Difficulties are solved through this ziyaarat and it is a tried and tested supplication for the removal of worries. The phrases of this ziyaarat clearly emphasis that in this age and every era, whatever bounties are bestowed by Allah upon this universe, it is solely on account of Ahle Bayt (a.s.). In this age, the Ahle Bait (a.s.) are represented by the holy personality of Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.). Thus, whatever divine bounties are being received by an individual in this era, it is entirely due to the grace and benediction of Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.)

Let us reflect on the sentences of this ziyaarat. "May my father, mother, children, possessions and I be sacrificed upon you! Whosoever desires nearness to Allah must commence with you. Whosoever professes the Unity of God learns it from you. Whosoever desires proximity to Allah must turn towards you. O my master! Neither can I enumerate your virtues nor can I fathom your merits. I'm powerless in mentioning your noble attributes. You are the light of the virtuous, the guide of the pious and the proof of the Omnipotent (Lord). Allah created you first, and through you He shall conclude the creation. On account of you, He sends down abundant and wide-spread rain and due to you the sky is prevented from falling down over the earth (else

this world would have been destroyed). Due to you, He drives away troubles and dismisses hardships."

The above sentences reinforce the point that the Ahle Bait (a.s.) are not only the source of all worldly benefits, but also the origin and the fountainhead of all spiritual benefits. The first of the five foundations of Islam is the Unity of Allah (Tauheed). It would not be wrong to say that the belief in the Unity of Allah is correct only for that person who acquires this belief from the Ahle Bait (a.s.). Consequently, the one who acquires this belief from someone other than the Ahle Bait (a.s.), his belief would be defective and worthless. For, none other than the Ahle Bait (a.s.) is blessed with the correct recognition of Allah. Therefore, the beliefs of only that individual will be acceptable before Allah who submits himself wholly to the Imamate and leadership of the Ahle Bait (a.s.).

Apart from spiritual bounties, the Ahle Bait (a.s.) are also the source of all material bounties. The falling of rain from the skies, the continued existence of this earth and the dispelling of difficulties and problems are all worldly bounties that materialise only due to the Ahle Bait (a.s.). It has been mentioned earlier that, in this age, Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) is the 'most perfect' individual from among the Ahle Bait (a.s.) on this earth. Hence, while reciting Ziyaarat-e-Jaameah al Kabeerah, it should be borne in mind that all the merits and virtues mentioned therein are relevant to only one person on this earth and that individual is none other than Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) This, despite the fact that we are deprived of meeting him on account of our sins.

The sentences of Dua'e Adeelah regarding Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) inform us -

"After Hazrat Imam Askari (a.s.), the representative of Allah is the Qaem, the Awaited, the Mahdi (a.s.) - whose reappearance is anticipated with hopeful eyes; the world is stable due to his presence; the creation receives its sustenance due to him and it is on account of his presence that the skies and the earth are intact"

(Dua-e-Adeelah, Mafaatihul Jinaan)

When Allah has Himself ordained that all spiritual and material bounties will flow to His creations through the medium of the Imam (a.s.), then how can the act of seeking one's desires from Allah through the Imam (a.s.) or even directly from the Imam (a.s.) be termed as Shirk (polytheism)? Those unwilling to acknowledge the medium of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) and regard it as polytheism (God forbid), are in fact rebelling against the divine arrangement. For such people, the fire of Hell is the only abode.

Mastership in the World of Creation (Wilayat-e-Takveeni)

Occasionally, one hears that it is fine to seek help through the position of the Ahle Bait (a.s.) or that it is acceptable to consider them as a medium before Allah. However, it is inappropriate to seek help from Ahle Bait (a.s.) directly or to call to them by saying "Ya Muhammad" or "Ya Ali." Calling out to them in this manner is against the belief in Unity of Allah. This view is expressed in several ways and shockingly, is considered as a sign of enlightened thinking.

The people who discuss such ideas are neither aware of the nuances of the Holy Quran, nor are they familiar with traditions on this subject. Every Muslim acknowledges the fact that the Majestic Quran is the word of Allah and whatever is narrated therein is the absolute truth. It is also unanimously accepted by all Muslims that none can surpass the Prophets of Allah (a.s.) in monotheism. Their actions are proofs and an ideal for each and every Muslim. While even a single instance may be sufficient to authenticate our point, the Noble Quran narrates numerous incidents of divine Prophets (a.s.), who sought help not from Allah, but directly from someone other than Allah. Let's pay attention to the following examples.

Prophet Sulayman (a.s.) and the Throne of Queen Bilqees

In the episode of Prophet Sulayman (a.s.), the hoopoe bird narrated the incident of the Queen of Saba to him (a.s.). Subsequently, he (a.s.) wrote a letter to the Queen. In reply to the letter, the Queen sent some gifts to Sulayman (a.s.) to assess whether he desired her kingdom for his own self or for the sake of Allah.

Prophet Sulayman (a.s.) returned all the gifts and addressed his army,

'He said: "O chiefs! Who among you can bring to me her throne before they submit to me voluntarily?" One courageous one among the jinn said: dal will bring it to you before you rise up from your place; and most surely I am strong (and) dependable for it." One who possessed a fraction of the knowledge of the Book said: "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye." Then when he (a.s.) saw the throne right next to him, he (a.s.) said: "This is of the grace of my Lord..."

(Surah Nami: Verses 38-40)

If we pay close attention to the above incident, we find that Sulayman (a.s.) put forth his question directly to the commanders of his army. He did not say, "O Lord! Do make the throne of Bilqees available to me." Moreover, the one who was granted the knowledge of the Book (Asif Ibn Barkhiya) and volunteered to bring the throne to Prophet Sulayman (a.s.) did not say that "I will pray before my Lord and that if Allah wishes the throne of Bilqees will come here." Rather he asserted, "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye." He related the act of bringing the throne to himself, saying "I will bring it for you..."

Prophet Isa (a.s.) would enliven the dead

All Muslims are unanimous in their belief that life and death is solely in the hands of Allah the All-Powerful. The Holy Quran reminds us,

"But Allah is the Guardian, and He gives life to the dead, and He has power over all things."

(Surah Shura: Verse 9)

However, there are two instances in the Majestic Quran where Allah (s.w.t.) has attributed the power of giving life to Prophet Isa (a.s.). For the sake of brevity, we present only the translation of these verses -

".... I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I mould for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission and I heal the blind and the lepers, and bring the dead to life with Allah's permission and I inform you of what you shall eat tomorrow and what you have stored in your houses; most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers." (Surah Ale Imran: Verse 49)

The above verse draws our attention to the point that throughout the verse, Prophet Isa (a.s.) attributes the acts to himself. He says that "I give life to the birds made from dust; I heal the blind; I bring the dead to life..." He does not say "I will pray to Allah and due to my supplication Allah grants vision to the blind." Nor does he say "Due to my prayers, Allah grants life to the birds as well as to the dead..." Rather he ascribes every action to himself saying "I give life; I heal the blind." That all these powers are not the inherent powers of Prophet Isa (a.s.) is an accepted fact. It is granted to him by Allah; which is why it is mentioned "with Allah's permission." But this verse does bring out the aspect that to attribute any action performed by the permission of Allah to towards oneself is a practice outlined by the Holy Quran. It is neither polytheism nor an innovation in religion. These were the words spoken by Prophet Isa (a.s.). It is interesting to note that even when Allah (s.w.t.) narrates these words in his Book, He attributes the action to Isa (a.s.) and not to Himself. He does mention that the action is performed with His permission, yet ascribes the act to Prophet Isa (a.s.).

The Majestic Quran mentions in Surah Maaedah, Verse 110, thus,

'When Allah will say: "O Isa son of Mariam! Remember My favour on you and on your mother, when I strengthened you with the holy Spirit, you spoke to the people in the cradle and in your old age, and when I taught you the Book and the wisdom and the Torah and the Injeel; and when you created out of clay a thing in the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the lepers by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead by My permission; and when I protected you from the children of Israel when you came to them with clear arguments; but those who disbelieved among them said: This is nothing but clear enchantment."

Please pay attention to the above verse minutely. Allah says that "you created; you healed the blind, you granted life to the dead". Allah (s.w.t.) does not say that "I created through you, I granted vision to the blind through you." No, it is not like that. All the actions are attributed directly to Prophet Isa (a.s.).

Now if a blind person, after hearing about the miracles of Prophet Isa (a.s.), approaches him directly and says, "O Isa Ibn Maryam! Grant me vision." - will this tantamount to polytheism? If a mother, devastated by the death of her young son approaches Isa (a.s.) and implores him to grant life to her son, then will this act be prohibited and bidah?

How often have we seen this in our daily lives that a destitute approaches a prosperous believer and seeks his needs from him?

"I am in great difficulty and in debt. Allah has granted you sufficient means. Please help me to repay my debt." The person replies, "Yes, I will help you."

Then the needy person says, "I have another request. My daughter's marriage has been finalised and the date for the marriage has been set. Yet, I have been unable to collect any amount for the same." The believer replies "Don't worry. I will arrange the amount for you."

The poor person says, "You have done so much for me, I have one final request. My son has completed his education, but has not secured a job as yet."

He replies, "You don't worry about that. Just send your son tomorrow to my office."

Are all these actions polytheism? The person who has alleviated three difficulties of the needy person, then is he not in the literal sense the fulfiller of his needs ("Qaazil Haajaat")? "Qaazi" means the "one who fulfils" and "Haajaat" implies needs. The collection of at least three needs is called as Haajaat. Will it be wrong if this needy person refers to his benefactor as Qaazil Haajaat? Of course not! On account of the bounties granted to him by Allah that this wealthy believer is Qazial Haajaat...

In short, if a needy person approaches an individual and seeks help from him due to the bounties granted to him by Allah, then it is NOT polytheism (shirk). On the contrary, it is the recommended practice of the Holy Quran.

The Secret of Wilayat-e-Takweeni.

What is the secret of the power of Asif Ibn Barkhiya and Prophet Isa (a.s.)? What is the element granted to these honourable individuals on the basis of which the throne of Bilqees was brought forth in the twinkling of an eye or the dead are brought back to life?

Dua-e-Semaat discusses the concept of the Great Names of Allah (Asmaa-e-A'zam) and some of their special characteristics.

"If you request to enliven the dead to life (through the Ism-e-A'zam), they will (certainly) rise from their graves."

Numerous such extraordinary effects are mentioned in this supplication. The supplication for the eve of Arafah mentions 33 effects of Ism-e-A'zam. These Great Names are the keys to solving all problems and difficulties. Those who have been granted these Asmaa-e-Aa'zam by Allah have been given the keys to the universe. So the secret behind Wilayat-e-Takweeni is Ism-e-A'zam. These Asmaa-e-A'zam are granted by Allah alone. It is not within the power of an ordinary human to acquire these by his own efforts.

The Great Names and the Ahle Bait (a.s.)

Since the Asmaa-e-A'zam are the keys to the universe, it is needless to say that the more an individual is granted from its treasures, the more extensive will be his powers and authority. For those who have been granted higher powers, when needs are addressed to them directly, they are permitted to respond to those requests in proportion.

Jaabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari (r.a.) narrates that Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) said,

"Allah has ordained 73 Asmad-e-A'zam. Janab Asif ibn Barkhiya had only one ism-e-A'zam. When he uttered it, the entire earth shrunk and the throne of Bilqees came forth. He just had to stretch his hand and the throne was in his grasp. Then the earth returned to its original state. We have

been granted 72 Asmaa-er A'zam. There is only one Isme'Aa'zam which Allah has retained with Himself."

(Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 330, H. 1)

Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) said, "Allah had granted Isa (a.s.) with only two Ism-e- A'zam through which he was able to perform all the actions. Musa (a.s.) was granted four and Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) was granted eight Asmaa-e-Aa'zam. Nuh (a.s.) was granted the knowledge of 15 Asmaa-e-A'zam while Adam (a.s.) was bestowed with 25 Asmaa-eA'zam. All of these were granted to Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.a.). Allah ordained 73 Asmaa-e-A'zam of which the knowledge of 72 was granted to Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.a.). He has retained one ism-e- A'zom exclusively with Himself."

(Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 330, H. 2)

Janab Muhammad Ibn Muslim narrates 'I once heard Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) say,

"Jibraeel presented himself before the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) with two pomegranates from the side of Allah. On the way, he met Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Taalib (a.s.). He (a.s.) asked Jibraeel, what are these pomegranates? He replied, one of them is concerned with Prophethood, which is not related to you. The other is concerning knowledge. Then, he met the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.). The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) divided the pomegranate equally. He (s.a.w.a.) ate half of it and offered the other half to Ali (a.s.) saying, 'You are a partner in my knowledge while I am partner in your knowledge? Then the Imam (a.s.) continued, "Whatever knowledge Allah the Almighty granted to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), ne (s.a.w.a.) transferred the entire treasure to Ali (a.s.). And it has continued in this manner till it has reached us today." And then Imam (a.s.) pointed to his heart."

(Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 263, H. 3)

Apart from this, there are other traditions that inform us that the knowledge of the past prophets (a.s.) is with the Ahle Bait (a.s.). Interested readers can refer to more traditions in Usool-e-Kafi, vol 1, pages 221, 223 and 227. These traditions make it amply clear that the knowledge of the previous prophets and that of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) is with the Imams (a.s.). They are the true inheritors of their possessions, books and collections. In the present era, Hazrat Hujjat Ibnil Hasan, Wali-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is the inheritor of this knowledge and perfections. He possesses the knowledge of 72 Asmaa-e-A'zam. Who can: estimate the extent of his authority and influence upon the universe? If one Ism-e A'zam can bring forth the throne of Bilgees in the blink of an eye, then it should come as no surprise that the possessor of 72 Asmaa-eA'zam can resolve difficulties in the twinkling of an eye. If Sulayman (a.s.) can seek the assistance of Asif Barkhiya on the basis of one Ism-e- A'zam, then to seek help directly from the one who has the knowledge of 72 Asmaae-A'zam, to call "O Mahdi, help me", or "O Mahdi assist me" etc is certainly not Shirk. Rather, it is the tradition of the prophets.

It should be borne in mind that all those who seek the solution of their problems directly from the Imams (a.s.), do not consider the Imams (a.s.) as an independent power alongside the authority of Allah. Rather it is their firm conviction that whatever is granted by the Imams (a.s.) is due to the powers bestowed upon them by Allah the Almighty. Allah has granted them authority and to seek from the Imams (a.s.) on account of the powers bestowed by Allah is

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equivalent to seeking from Allah Himself. Therefore, seeking one's desires directly from Imam-eZamana (a.s.) is not polytheism. Rather, it is completely legitimate and a custom endorsed by the verses of the Noble Quran. To deny this or to harbour doubts is tantamount to refuting the verses of the Majestic Quran and rebelling against divine custom. To refute the verses of the Holy Quran and to rebel against divine custom is indeed not monotheism. On the contrary, it is polytheism.

Special Greetings Pertaining To Imam-e- Zamana (a.s.)

Allah - The One sans partner - is the Creator of all creatures. His Being is Unique and Needless. He is the One before whom every particle of the universe is subservient and indigent. From eternity, He is Generous upon the world of creation. He showers His bounties upon His creatures, morning and evening. He does not withhold the flood of His bounties. His is the creation, His are the bounties. He is the fountainhead of all endowments. He is the One Who adorns the dawn. He is the Provider of light to the day and the shade in the blistering afternoon heat. He owns everything. Then why is He displeased with His servants? Why does He the Blessed and Merciful One - repeatedly · warn His servants about the refutation of His bounties?

There is reason for this. The moot cause is that the Creator bestowed intellect and reasoning upon his creation, the children of Adam (a.s.). Then He sent His apostles, prophets and their successors for the propagation of knowledge and shariah. He thus illuminated the paths of guidance among mankind. Subsequently, He gave them a choice - Be among the thankful ones or be among those who deny the bounties. His anger is directed to the second group, to those who refute His bounties. Hence the tone of the verses reflects Majesty and Dominion. The verse thunders: Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?

(Surah Rahman)

However, when He addresses His true worshippers, the manner and style changes. The tone of conversation softens. He speaks to them in a cheerful tone. The listeners are of different disposition, of a different nature. The sublime fragrance embedded in their nature is uplifting. Their visions and hearts are the centres for a mysterious Proof. This is a unique level of submission and acceptance. Here the speaker says to the audience: "We, the angels are with you believers. Verily, Allah the High sends greetings (salawaat) and His angels too send greetings, and you, o believers! Also send greetings on the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and submit to his orders." This is the final stage of submission and acceptance where windows of cognition and faith open before a believer upon his incessant recitation and repetition of salawaat. He (the believer) is engulfed in the sea of bewilderment and wonder. He then submits in thankfulness because he has been included in the rows of angels who send salawaat upon the Prophet (s.a.w.a.). Allah has instructed us to submit to His Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and enlightens our intellect so that we strive towards the recognition of His Prophet (s.a.w.a.). We know that His Messengers and successors (a.s.) are not from us. They are different. Their creation is different. They are unique and exclusive. They are such noble and dignified divine ambassadors that Allah - Blessed and High Be He - invites His angels and the believers to send salawaat upon them. The sovereignty of these chaste individuals (a.s.) is such that if a person doubts regarding them, he loses sight of the path to submission and satisfaction. Thus, we have been bestowed with the gift of salawaat. · It is an emblem that contains not only the voice of Allah, but also His angels and the believers. So, the caravan which started its journey with Hazrat Adam (a.s.) continues its voyage towards the Lord of the Day of Judgment in the footsteps of Haabil. It will reach its eternal abode with the help of salawaat.

Now, it is incumbent on us that we constantly recite salawaat upon that representative of Allah, who is the soul of the universe, the successor of als Prophets and Messengers, the Imam of the

time (a.s.) and thus be enumerated among the believers as mentioned by Allah. There are some methods and illuminations for this salawaat. Some additional shades and hues have been illustrated about it by our scholars. Hence, we will mention some of them over here and throw some light upon their meanings and contexts.

We will also discuss the salawaat of Abu Zarraab-e-Isfahani for Imam Zamana (a.s.) in the forthcoming pages.

The literal meaning of salawaat is "deep concentration". Allama Tabatabai (r.a.) explains in his exegesis Al-Mizan. (Surah Ahzab: 43) that the complete and comprehensive meaning of salawaat can only be gleaned from its context. Normally, it means the "attentiveness of the heart towards somebody" but the meaning differs with the change of context. Some have opined that salawaat with reference to Allah means Mercy while the salawaat of the angels is an intense prayer for forgiveness and the salawaat of a believer is (just) a prayer. So, we can apply the meaning of salawaat as prayer in context to the angels and believers and the literal meaning also corroborates this.

The author of Majma'ul Bayaan has mentioned the meaning of salawaat as Zikr (remembrance). While Al-Mufradaat of Raaghib states that most dictionaries have called it as prayer, commendation or praise. He has quoted the narration of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) under Sura Baqarah - 'when someone calls for food then accept it. And if you are fasting, then pray (YO-SAL-LEY) for him'. The salawaat has been used in Qur'an in the meaning of prayer. It is mentioned in Sura Tauba, verse 103:

Take alms out of their property, you would cleanse them and purify them thereby, and pray (SAL-LEY) for them. Surely your prayer (salawaat) is a relief for them. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing

The meaning of salawaat in Sura Ahzaab, verse 43 is in the meaning of "attention" and "importance":

He it is Who has His attention (YO-SAL-LI) on you, and (so do) His angels, that He may bring you forth out of utter darkness into the light And He is Merciful to the believers

This verse clarifies the fact that attention of Allah is His mercy.

Allah says in Sura Ahzaab, verse 55:

Surely Allah and His angels send salawaat on the Prophet. O you who believe! Call for (Divine) blessings upon him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation.

What is evident from this verse is that it is incumbent on a believer to send salutations upon the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) along with Allah and His angels. Both Shias and Sunnis consider it an important worship and send salutations upon the Prophet and his progeny (s.a.w.a.).

Historical background of salawaat

The verses on Meesaaq (covenant) in the Holy Qur'an make it clear that Allah had ordered all his messengers to introduce Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and his progeny (s.a.w.a.) among their respective nations. On the other hand, H. Adam (a.s.) was told to make use of the intercession of the progeny of Mohammad (s.a.w.a.) for the acceptance of his request and the mode of worship is best known to the messengers (a.s.). Looking at the general and collective meanings

of salawaat, it would be apt to say that when H. Adam (a.s.) would have seen the majesty and grandeur of Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and his progeny (a.s.), then he would not have sought Allah's forgiveness without extolling and commending them. According to a tradition (hadees) in Behaarul Anwaar, the Bani Israel were ordered to send salawaat on the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and his progeny (a.s.). This happened when H. Musa (a.s.) mentioned the difficulties facing the Bani Israel to his Lord. Allah instructed him, 'O Musa! When the Bani Israel face difficulties, instruct them to pray for their needs after sending salawaat on the Ahle Bait (a.s.). Surely they will find salvation'. Allama Majlisi (r.a.) has penned interesting anecdotes in this regard. For further reference, one may refer to Behaarul Anwaar, vol.39, pg.61.

Kinds of Salawaat

In the light of traditions, salawaat can be divided into two parts - short and elaborate. The most common and smallest salawaat is 'Allahumma Salle Alaa Muhammad wa Aale Muhammad' introduced by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). Both Shias and Sunnis are unanimous about this point. As for a detailed salawaat, those who consider salawaat as the foundation of worship know that there are different and elaborate salawaat for each of the fourteen Infallibles (a.s.) and these have come in the traditions. We have been ordered to recite these salawaat. Special salawaat related to the infallible personas (a.s.) can be perused in the last part of Mafaatihul Jinaan.

There is one more type of salawaat which has two facets- Transmitted and nontransmitted. Transmitted salawaat are those which have come from the words of the Infallible guides (a.s.) and the non-transmitted are the salawaat of the scholars presented before Muhammad and his progeny (s.a.w.a.) as a token of their beliefs and faith. However, the scholars have been careful to use only those terms and sentences that have been expressed in the various salawaat of the Infallibles (a.s.). Readers will be surprised to know that even prejudiced Sunni scholars - despite their enmity with the Shias - have written books detailing the incredible effects of reciting salawaat upon Prophet Muhammad and his progeny (s.a.w.a.). The book "Wasilatul Khadim ilal makhdoom" by Fazl Ibn Roozbahaan Kanji can be cited as an example. He has mentioned the salawaat for Imam Zamana (a.s.) on page 359 in these words:

O Allah! Send your blessings, mercy and peace upon the twelfth Imam. The upright, the awaited, the scholar, the powerful, the successor of the choicest of the chosen, the inheritor of the might of Murtuza (a.s.); the successor of the impeccable morals of Hasan (a.s.); the inheritor of the determination of Husain (a.s.), the worship of Ali Ibn Husain (a.s.), the sciences of the of Baqir (a.s.).....The one who gains precedence upon mankind through nobility and excellence. The loved Imam, the promised manifestation. ... and the Proof, the Upright, the awaited one for the time of reappearance."

I have only quoted a few lines for the sake of brevity. This is how they had penned salawaat for the Infallible Imams (a.s.).

Salawaat of Abu Zarraab Isfahani

Sayyed Ibn Tawoos says that salawaat of Zurrab Isfahani is that salawaat upon Muhammad and his progeny (s.a.w.a.) which has been narrated from Imam Zamana (a.s.). This is an invaluable salawaat which should not be abandoned on Friday even if due to some reason the other prayers cannot be recited on that day, since it is a divine secret of which Allah Himself has made us aware.

Sayyed ibn Tawoos says that 'My forefather Abu Ja'far Toosi (r.a.) narrating from reliable sources quotes

"Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf Zarraab Isfahani related to me while he was returning from Isfahan.

'I (Yaqub) left for Hajj with some Sunnis of our city in 281 A.H. When we reached Makkah, one of us rented a house in the middle of the Lail market. It was the House of J. Khadijah (s.a) but was more popular as the House of Imam Reza (a.s.). An old wheatish complexioned lady resided therein. When! came to know that this house is famous as the "house of imam Reza (a.s.)" I became curious. I inquired from the lady "Since when are you residing in this house? How are you related to the people of this house? Why was it named the house of Imam Reza (a.s.)?" She replied, "I am from the followers of Ahlul Bait (a.s.) and this is the house of Imam Ali Ibn Musa Reza (a.s.). Hasan Askari (a.s.) has asked me to reside here. I was among his (a.s.) servants." Hearing this I felt a sense of attachment with her. However, I kept this (secret) from my Sunni friends. When I would complete my circumambulation at night, I would sleep with them in the courtyard of the house. We would lock the hallway door and place a large boulder behind the door dragging it there. In many nights, we saw that the door would open by itself and a radiant person would enter the house. He was of wheatish-complexion, average height, handsome visage, and a mark of prostration (on his forehead). He would be wearing two garments, a fine cloak and sandals. He would go directly to that room of the house where the old woman lived. While she would always tell us that only her daughter entered her room. That radiant light would climb the stairs. I saw the light on the first floor passage moving towards the room. I would then witness the same light in the room while ! could not see any lamp being lit. My companions saw this and surmised that this was a man who had married the old lady's daughter and had come to meet her. They then said, "These are Alawis (implying Shias), and this is Mut'ah." For them mu'tah was forbidden. We would see him regularly entering and leaving the house while the boulder would always be in its place. We would lock the door from inside for fear of our possessions being stolen and only we would shift the rock to open the door. We saw that the person entered and left the house without moving the stone aside while we had to struggle to move it all the time. There was a pounding in my heart when I saw such strange sights. I became courteous and friendly with the old lady as I was keen to know the identity of that man. I told her, 'O So-and-so! I would like to ask you a few questions while I'm alone. When you find me alone in the house, come down so I can talk to you. She immediately replied "I too would like to confide in you but have been unable to do so due to your companions. I asked, 'What is it you want to say?' She replied, 'It has been said to me - she did not say by whom - that you should not be bad mannered with your friends and companions. Don't argue with them and do not fight with them because they are your enemies. Always be kind and affectionate with them. I asked her, 'Who told you this?' She replied, 'I am saying it!

Since I was in awe of her I couldn't gather the courage to question her again. I queried, 'About which friends are you warning me?' I thought she would point to the friends who had accompanied me to Hajj. But she said, 'Those friends who are your partners and live with you in your house.' There had been an altercation between me and they on matters of religion and they had complained about me. Hence I had run away from my city and had spend a few days in hiding. I asked that lady, 'How did you come to love Imam Reza (a.s.)?' 'I was a servant of Imam Hasan Askar (a.s.), she replied. I was now convinced about her genuineness so I thought of asking her about the hidden Imam (a.s.). I said, 'By Allah! Have you seen him?' She answered, 'Brother, I have not seen him. ! had come to the city along with my pregnant sister and Iram Hasan Askari (a.s.) gave glad tidings to me that I will soon see him in my last days and he instructed me, "Serve him as you serve me." I was in Egypt till sometime back. I have travelled here due to a man from Khurasan, not proficient in Arabic, who bore my expenses or thirty dinars and ordered me perform Hajj in this year. So, I left with the hope of seeing him (a.s.). The narrator (Yaqub) says, 'For a moment I thought in my heart 'is the person that I see coming and going 'Mahdi'?. I took out ten Razavi dirhams which I had intended to be placed at Maqame Ibrahim (as) and gave it to her. I thought to myself, "Giving it to people in the progeny of Fatima (s.a) is better than placing it at Maqame Ibrahim (a.s.) and has a greater reward." I told her, "Give these dirhams to the worthy among the progeny of Fatima (s.a). I thought that the old lady would give it to the person I had seen and he would accept it. She went to her room taking the money along with her and came back after a little while. She said, 'He says, "We do not have right upon the money. Spend it as you had intended earlier. But take the equivalent of the razavi coins from us and donate it as you had intended. I did as I was told and thought to myself, "This has been ordered by the same man (Imam (a.s.)).

I had a copy of the tauqee' issued to Qasim Ibn al-Alaa in Azerbaijan. I requested her to show this to someone who was familiar with the tauqee' of Imam (a.s.). She said, "Give it to me. Surely, I can recognize it." She saw the tauqee' and I suspected that she may be the right person to identify the tauqee'. However she said, "I am unable to read it at this place." So she took it to her room. Then she came down and said "This tauqee' is authentic and correct." It was written in the tauqee', "I give you a glad tiding which I have not given anybody else before" Then she inquired, "He (a.s.) has asked you that when you send salawaat upon the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) what do you recite?" | replied:

"O Allah!: Send Your Blessings uponi Muhammad & his progeny and shower Your Munificence upon Muhammad & his progeny like You bestowed Your Blessings, Munificence & Mercy upon Ibrahim and his progeny. Certainly You are Most commendable & praiseworthy.

On hearing this she said, "Do not send salawaat like this. Rather, when you send salawaat on them then take the name of each one of them individually". I replied: "Okay".

The next day, she brought a small book with her and said, "He (a.s.) has instructed you, that when you send salawaat upon the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) then send salawaat upon him and his successors according to this copy. I took it from her and acted upon it. I observed on a number of nights that he (a.s.) descended from the room and light of the lamp was still constant. I used to open the door and follow the light but would never find anyone but would see the light bowing down in prostration. I saw groups of men from other cities come to the house of this

old lady and give some letters. The old lady too would give them similar letters. They would converse with her but I could not understand their discussions. I saw a group from them when I met them on my way back to Baghdad (after Hajj). The diary that I received from Hazrat (a.t.f.s) contained the following salawaat:

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent & the Most Merciful O Allah! Bless Muhammad (s.a.w.a), the chief of the messengers, the seal of the prophets (a.s.), the proof of the Lord of the worlds, the chosen one in the covenant (meesaq) the strong rope and the straight path. And bestow Your Blessings on your friend, the guardians of Your covenant and the Imams (a.s.) from his descendants; prolong their lives and increase their age; make them reach their highest expectations - in the religion, this world and the Hereafter. Surely You possess power over all things

This salawaat has been narrated in authentic books through varied chains of authority and its recitation has been greatly emphasized.

Dear readers, we have related the entire incident to gauge the importance of this salawaat and get proximity to Holy Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w.a.) and his progeny (a.s.) in general and Imam Zamana (a.s.) in particular. Aameen. We cannot estimate the spiritual impact of the sentences of this salawaat. It would have been befitting to present a brief exegesis and explanation of the same, but fearing prolongation, we will discuss it in the future.

The Excellence of Salawaat:

Salawaat is a sunnah in which Allah and His angels are associated. The angels are continually sending salawaat on Mohammad and his progeny (s.a.w.a.). Salawaat is a plea which is never rejected. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) says in a tradition, "The one who does not send salawaat upon me, religion is not for him."

(Sharh wa Fazaile Salalwaat; al-Kafi p. 52, reproduced from Sala'e ifhaam)

Several books have been penned on the merits of salawaat. Interested readers may refer to Sharh wa Fazaile Salawaat for further details.

The Benefits of Salawaat

It has come in traditions that when the person sends salawaat once upon the Holy prophet (s.a.w.a.), Allah orders an angel to deliver the salawaat to the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) faster than the blinking of an eye. This angel goes to the shrine of the Holy prophet (s.a.w.a.) and says, "So-and-so has send this salawaat upon you." The Holy prophet (s.a.w.a.) replies, "Deliver my benediction upon him."

(Sharh wa Fazaile Salalwaat; marhum Sayyed Ahmad Hussaini irdekan, p. 89)

Keeping in view the meaning of salawaat, it is worth noting the position of the person whose salawaat has been accepted by the Holy prophet (s.a.w.a.) and for whom he (s.a.w.a) too has recited salawaat. This cannot be estimated by anyone except Allah..

The Holy prophet (s.a.w.a.) relates in a tradition,

"The one who sends salawaat upon me every morning and evening in my love and affection, it is necessary for Allah to forgive him that day."

(Beharul Anwaar, vol. 92, p. 70)

Ameerul Momeneen (a.s.) informs: "No prayer (dua) is answered without salawaat upon Mohammad and his progeny (s.a.w.a.)"

(Beharul Anwaar, vol. 9, p. 58)

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) wills to Imam Ali (a.s.):

O Ali! Whosoever sends salawaat on me during the day, my intercession is obligatory for him even if he is performing the great sins.

(Jaame'ul Akhbaar, ch. 28, p. 67, H. 5)

The benefits of salawaat have been mentioned in this lengthy tradition.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said: One day the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) said to Ali (a.s.), "O Ali (a.s.)! Would you like me to inform you of some good news?" Imam (a.s.) replied, "Yes, May my parents be sacrificed upon you. You always inform us about goodness." The Holy prophet (s.a.w.a.) said, "Jibraeel (a.s.) came to me and informed me of an amazing thing." "And what is it?" asked H. Ali (a.s.). The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) replied, "The person who sends salawaat on Mohammad and his progeny (s.a.w.a.), doors of heaven will be opened for him and the angels will recite seventy salawaat on behalf of that person. If the man is a sinner, his sins will detach from him like leaves falling from a tree. And it will be announced from Allah's side, "O My servant, I am present. And for you is success." Then it shall be said to the angels, "O My angels! Recite seventy salawaat on his behalf and I will recite seven hundred salawaat." And the person who sends salawaat on me and not on my progeny, there exist seventy veils between his salawaat. and the heavens and Allah addresses him, "For you there is neither any goodness nor any reward. I do not accept you" Then He addresses His angels: "O My angels! Do not ascend this salawaat till he includes the .. progeny of Mohammad (s.a.w.a.) in it."

(Beharul Anwaar, vol. 92, p. 56, H. 30)

Some traditions have added 'Ajil farajahum' to 'Allahumma salla alaa Muhammad wa Aale Muhammad'. And reciting as such is ordered in the time of occultation. There are innumerable other benefits of salawaat which we are unable to: recount due to brevity.

I pray before the Almighty that He may bestow the tawfeeq of reciting salawaat upon us and hasten the reappearance of our master Imam Zamana (a.s.). Aameen!